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ALARM BEHAVIOUR OF LESSER NODDIES

Lesser Noddies *Anous tenuirostris melanops* are small, dark-plumaged, tropical terns that build elaborate nests on the branches of the White Mangrove *Avicennia marina*. The observations below were collected during field studies on Pelsaert Island (28°56'S, 113°58'E), the southernmost island in the Houtman Abrolhos, Western Australia. Observations were made in the field during the 1991/92 breeding season and further records were made in the early part of 1992/93.

During my study into the reproductive biology of the Lesser Noddy, it was necessary to trap and band individuals at the nest. A small hand net with fine mesh of about 25 cm diameter was used initially to capture adults. Many birds would remain on the nest when incubating, and with experience the most effective means of capture was by carefully surrounding the bird with both hands.

Initially, adult Lesser Noddies gave little reaction on being approached, occasionally passively pecking several times. If the approach was slow, capture would nearly always be successful. Adults previously handled would vigorously

peck, make alarm calls, and at the last moment leave the nest. This change in behaviour became apparent during 1991/92 and was useful in avoiding unnecessary recaptures, as hands could not always be seen on sitting birds. Thus stress to birds of the study could be minimized.

During a return visit in October 1992, I was concerned with locating individuals banded during the previous year by checking along last year's transects. Banded individuals began their defensive behaviour and thus facilitated the selection and recapture of last season's individuals, resulting in a more concentrated effort on the birds sought.

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C. A. SURMAN

School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Murdoch University,
Murdoch, Western Australia 6150

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